

Logan Smith

In the late autumn of the eighteenth year of the twentieth century, the weather showed nothing unusual, afternoon was evening and evening was night. The ocean in Trinidad carried no scent in her mist the evening before Norman, Mae, and Lois saw Chester off to Europe. Nobody spoke of Chester's task in the coming weeks, months or years, in fact, nobody spoke at all. Lois looked at the ground and walked aimlessly, Mae withdrew frequently for a cigarette, and Norman sat in the corner of the house all day flipping the golden laced pages of his copy of the scripture. Chester seemed the most rigid and pale of all. He had been in the yard all day getting sick, speaking to himself and getting sick again. Mae had made the table and dinner exceptionally and the four of them were dressed and appeared unfittingly proper for the occasion.

Norman Smith was likely the most religious man north of the bay and one could tell by the way he prayed. He spoke with a careful reverence he reserved for the dinner prayer, indeed he trusted there was someone listening. Even the most ardent nonbeliever would acknowledge the presence of Norman's Lord when they visited for dinner, but no such visitors were there to witness the effect his prayer this evening. As he bent over to pray Norman folded his hands so tightly that the edges of his fingers grew as pale as his beard. He closed his eyes and with a mastery of focus and contemplation that Chester admired from a young age, he began to pray. "Our Father who art in Heaven,"

Time slowed and immediately Chester could tell his father's words were different than usual. Norman recited his Lord's prayer as if he were casting a spell. Chester felt the compelling awareness that one would feel moments before death.

Norman's words lied somewhere between a plea and a prophecy. A plea that his son may be spared and a prophecy that he would not. A plea that Norman could keep his head when Chester would pass, and a prophecy that he couldn't. Chester's stomach buckled and his head tightened as he thought about what existed in his life or anyone's that could bare meaning to the greater forces of the universe that have demanded him to stand at attention.

This land and home would be gone soon too. Not one more foot would print the beach and the trees elsewhere would be too faint and weak.

Chester suddenly began to hear a clamour in his head. - *bang ratchet clap bang bang*. He could hear faintly his father's commanding voice over what sounded like the time he was lost miles out from the bay two years ago. He clung to the stern at the mercy of the ocean the sound and mass of the waves playing tug of war with his boat and life.

"Give us this day our daily bread."

Eyes closed still, questions tormented Chester's psyche: Would there be a safe place he landed after this earth, and to what extent did the slaughtering of men prevent one from finding rest there? How is it that this level of compelling confusion would ever come to make sense even by divine power? Where does it begin and end? -*bang ratchet clap bang bang*- Chester was tossed as the boat capsized in the rain.

The waves grew angrier and Chester clung to the overturned boat. The *swish swosh* mocked his lack of control and scoffed at his life in a way that made it all seem meaningless. They would come to and fro not one swell courageous enough to carry him in direction to the shore and to safety. Why with all the water in the world could the ocean permit not one wave to

stretch infinitely into the mountains beyond? The faint sounds of his father's voice echoed like the Lord himself from above

“...those who trespass against us...”

Amid rain, noise, and steel, he turned his head upward and began to fall under the ocean. Sound and sight grew faint, and the body cold. Chester felt his person suspended in the sea as limp and hopeless as life itself. Consumed by hate and fear, he was neither able nor willing to understand. He strained his eyes for the surface that was now leagues above his head, the mad sea had forced him to surrender.

“Chester! Father! Do something!” Lois shrieked for Chester’s consciousness and Mae for Norman’s attention. Norman remained unshaken, finishing his prayer and ignoring his son.

“The power, the glory, for ever and ever, Amen.” Norman opened his eyes slowly, unfolded his hands and rested his gaze on the sad specimen writhing on his kitchen floor. “Get up.”

At that moment, the ocean, the planet, God and Man all wished Chester Smith to live. His soul and body sprung from the ocean floor, pressure lifting from his skull, light streaming in as he torpedoed to the still surface of the sea. When he breathed, he breathed in not oxygen but gratefulness, joy and understanding; each with their own color and taste swirling around him on a level of divine support that filled his lungs, then his head, then every cell of his being. Chester shifted his hands reassured by the boots of his father now squatting before him with a firm hand on his back. A liberating sense of selflessness compelled Chester to erupt in a joyful fit at his father’s feet, pulling at the hem of his slacks laughing hysterically.

“I’m alive, father I’m alive!” He cried, hugging the two feet of his now standing father.

Lois came to his side with a handkerchief pale and worried, for she had never seen so much as a tear or laughter from Chester who now was now giddy with excitement covered in tears, vomit and piss from the violent seizure. Chester sprung from the floor and embraced his father who uttered, barely audible,

“Stay fast, and hold on”